

SAFE ENVIRONMENT PROGRAM FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What do I need to do if I want to volunteer to minister with children?

Thank you for answering the call to ministry! Anyone who serves directly with children (catechists, youth choir leaders, etc.) must be cleared by the diocese BEFORE they can begin ministry. (This rule also applies to volunteers who don't routinely work with children but may find themselves alone with children sometimes, such as sacristans, cantors, or ushers. Since every parish has a different layout and procedures, the pastor will determine which of these ministers need to be cleared.) There are two steps to getting cleared: having a background check done and completing Safe Environment training. The background check can be done by getting fingerprinted or by using the alternative method allowed under Meghan's Law, and the training may be done online or in a live training session. Your parish staff has the forms and dates you need.

I got fingerprinted 10 years ago when I first volunteered. Do I have to do it again?

You only need to be fingerprinted once. If it's been a long time, though, or if you dropped out of ministry for a while and are starting fresh, you should check with your parish or the diocese to make sure you're still in the database.

I already had a background check for work. Why do I have to be fingerprinted again?

When your investigation is completed, the results go into one of several different databases, depending on the reason for the investigation and what's on the form you submit. A teacher's info goes to the Board of Education, a nurse's to the hospital, etc. The diocese doesn't have access to those other databases, so the only way for them to know your results is to be fingerprinted again and have another investigation done and make sure the results are sent to the diocese.

We have two adults present for our meeting, but one child needs to be escorted to the bathroom. How does a lone adult take a child to the bathroom?

If the child is old enough to go to the bathroom and back by himself, that's fine. For younger children, the best solution is to walk the child to the bathroom and then wait outside. If the child needs help, it's best to leave the bathroom door open while you assist the child. The idea is to avoid being in a private setting with the child. Keeping the door open keeps it public, since anyone who walks by could see what you're doing and know it's appropriate.

**Does the rule against touching a child mean I can NEVER touch a child?
What about at the sign of peace during Mass, for example?**

There's nothing wrong with hugging a child when you're sharing a sign of peace. It's an appropriate action in the context of the Mass, and is done in a public setting in a nonsexual way. That's fine. In the same way, if a child hugs you when you meet before a class, you can certainly return a brief hug in a completely nonsexual way. You could touch a child on the shoulder to get his or her attention. Holding a crying child to comfort him or her is fine. These actions are appropriate in the situation and are done in front of plenty of other people. Just make sure you don't touch the child in an inappropriate area or in a way that might confuse the child about your intentions, and you'll be fine.